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SUBJECT: ADMIRAL FARGO DISCUSSES AREAS OF FURTHER
COOPERATION WITH GVN

11. (SBU) Summary: In separate meetings with Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and Deputy Foreign Minister Le Van Bang on February 9, Admiral Thomas Fargo, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, highlighted the recent improvement of bilateral relations, and discussed establishment of an IMET program, POW/MIA issues, demining, and cooperation on transnational issues such as counterterrorism and counternarcotics. DPM Dung expressed particular interest in counternarcotics cooperation and English language training for Vietnamese military officers. He also made a request for continuing demining/UXO assistance to help reduce the "weekly" casualties relating to UXO. Bang stressed Vietnam's efforts on counterterrorism, highlighting Vietnam's participation in the ASEAN Bali CT conference, recent information sharing efforts with regional partners as well as the U.S., and participation in regional CT working groups. Both Dung and Bang spoke approvingly about the recent visit of the U.S.S. Vandergrift to Ho Chi Minh City and a planned second visit of another U.S. Navy vessel in April to the northern port of Haiphong. Dung said the GVN would welcome "even more frequent" ship visits. End summary.

DPM Dung

12. (U) Ship visits: In addition to a presentation at Vietnam's National Defense University, meetings with senior MOD officials and a call on retired hero General Vo Nguyen Giap in Hanoi, and visits to Danang and Ho Chi Minh City during his February 8 to 11 visit to Vietnam (septels), Admiral Fargo called on senior GVN officials in Hanoi, accompanied by Ambassador. Communist Party of Vietnam Politburo member and Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and Admiral Fargo reiterated satisfaction at the pace of development of bilateral relations in 2003. DPM Dung called both Minister of Defense Pham Van Tra's visit to Washington and the U.S.S. Vandergrift visit to Ho Chi Minh City "milestones." He said that he "welcomed" the upcoming April ship visit to Haiphong, and hoped that U.S. warships could visit Vietnam "even more frequently."

13. (SBU) Transnational issues: Admiral Fargo noted that within the Southeast Asian region there are many transnational issues of concern shared by both Vietnam and the U.S., particularly counterterrorism, trafficking in persons, counternarcotics, and piracy. These issues require multinational solutions. Admiral Fargo identified counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and English training for Vietnamese military officers as the areas with the greatest potential for common action. DPM Dung expressed agreement with the Admiral's assessment, adding that security cooperation should be at the top of the list. In the matter of U.S.-Vietnam cooperation on terrorism, DPM Dung suggested starting with an exchange of information. The same mechanism for sharing terrorism-related information could be used to share narcotics information, he added. Admiral Fargo noted that, while counternarcotics is a large issue of concern for Vietnam, Southeast Asia, and the United States, it is not in general a military issue. However, he added, the military has some capability to support other agencies in this kind of activity, such as PACOM's own JIATF-West, which has worked to train other militaries and agencies in the region. He noted that in Thailand, JIATF-West had created an intelligence fusion center, which is a good model to deal with regional CN issues.

14. (U) POW/MIA: DPM Dung said he would also like to promote greater cooperation on MIA issues, including Vietnamese KIAs. He pointed with pride to the efforts the Vietnamese had put into this issue, but noted that the remaining U.S. cases are located in remote areas, or are underwater, and therefore would require further coordination in order to resolve. He requested that the U.S. provide more information about Vietnamese KIA cases. Admiral Fargo thanked DPM Dung for Vietnam's help and support in the MIA effort, and noted that Vietnam's assistance has been essential to the progress made to date. He added that the USG has provided information relating to Vietnamese KIAs in the past, and would continue to provide information in the

future. He agreed with DPM Dung about the difficulty of continuing in remote or underwater sites, and said this was the reason why the USG wanted to expand cooperation to cover underwater operations. Admiral Fargo proposed coordinating U.S. and Vietnamese experts to discuss diving and salvage possibilities and urged the use of U.S. salvage ships for underwater recoveries.

15. (U) Demining: DPM Dung urged Admiral Fargo to encourage the USG, in particular the Department of Defense, to push forward with cooperation with the Vietnamese armed forces to help reduce UXO casualties, which remained a "weekly" occurrence in Vietnam, especially near former U.S. military bases in the center of the country. He asked the U.S. to provide "better and more practical demining assistance." He expressed Vietnam's appreciation for assistance the U.S. has provided to date, but said that "even more would be greatly appreciated, both equipment and training." Admiral Fargo noted that UXO/demining is a global problem and promised to "see what was possible" to help Vietnam. He added that Vietnam's expertise in this area is well known might represent an opportunity for Vietnam to contribute internationally.

16. (U) IMET: Concerning English training, Admiral Fargo noted that there were some things that we would be possible immediately, and the USG was happy to pursue those things. He encouraged the GVN to consider signing an IMET agreement with the U.S. DPM Dung said that "IMET interests us very much" and that Vietnam would prefer to start cooperation in the program with the English training for officers.

17. (U) Exchanges: Admiral Fargo cited multinational fora as a way to discuss many issues, highlighting the annual Chiefs of Defense conference and U.S.-Vietnam medicine and military law exchanges. He encouraged Vietnam to participate as much as possible in the "full range of events." DPM Dung thanked him for the offer, and invited him to return to Vietnam soon.

Foreign Ministry

18. (U) Mil/Mil: In the absence of Foreign Minister Nien (traveling in the region), Admiral Fargo met Deputy Foreign Minister (and former Ambassador to Washington) Le Van Bang, who described U.S.-Vietnam relations as "booming" in both trade and humanitarian areas. He added that improved military-to-military relations were the "core" of bilateral government interaction. He spoke positively of the recent U.S. Navy ship visit in Ho Chi Minh City, noting especially that he was impressed by the humanitarian volunteer activities undertaken by the sailors during their visit to Vietnam. Admiral Fargo noted that another ship visit was scheduled for Haiphong, and expressed a hope that ship visits would become a part of regular interaction rather than special events.

19. (SBU) CT: DFM Bang pointed specifically to preventing terrorism as an area in which the GVN was taking number of new steps, including sharing information with partners in the region and with Washington, and noted that he himself had attended a recent ASEAN counterterrorism conference in Bali. He said that the GVN was working with a regional center for counterterrorism in Indonesia, as well as participating in regional counterterrorism and law enforcement working groups. DFM Bang characterized the threat posed by groups such as Jemaah Islamiah as considerable. "We must have good coordination to follow such organizations," Bang declared.

10. (U) More CT: Admiral Fargo agreed that counterterrorism would be a productive area for interaction, and suggested that Vietnam would have an excellent opportunity to discuss this at the Regional Chiefs of Defense discussions that the U.S. hosted every year. Admiral Fargo noted that the USG frequently sees links between terrorist groups and other types of transnational crime, especially drug smuggling. He remarked on the recently signed Counter-Narcotics Letter of Agreement between the USG and the GVN, and suggested that the GVN might cooperate with JIATF-West.

11. (U) Admiral Fargo urged establishing an IMET training program with the GVN. Bang admitted that English ability is a major deficiency in the GVN armed forces. Admiral Fargo suggested that IMET funds could be used to establish in-country language training for Vietnamese officers as a first step, before expanding into other opportunities for training in the United States.

12. (U) Iraq: Admiral Fargo expressed his appreciation for GVN contributions to Afghanistan and Iraq. Bang noted Vietnam had already donated \$700,000 to Iraq and Afghanistan (in the form of rice and school supplies), and promised that "we'll try our best" to secure further donations for Iraq. Admiral Fargo urged Vietnam's participation in future

peacekeeping missions. Bang opined that Vietnamese officers would have to improve their English abilities first.

¶13. (U) Misc: Admiral Fargo reiterated his appreciation for GVN assistance on the search for MIAs, and offered USG cooperation wherever possible in the search for Vietnamese KIAs. Bang also cited demining as an area in which the GVN would appreciate further USG assistance.

¶14. (SBU) Comment: Admiral Fargo's visit was a welcome opportunity to maintain momentum in mil/mil ties and in moving forward in bilateral ties in general. We are especially encouraged by the DPM's emphasis on information sharing in the CT and counternarcotics arenas, but expect that this will move forward by cautious steps, not leaps and bounds.

BURGHARDT